

# Generational Gaps Can Hamper Communication

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Today's workforce is comprised of four distinct generations. As Americans are putting off retirement and working longer, the chance of a Traditionalist colliding with a Millennial at the copy machine or in the break room is highly likely. While most of the time different generations can get along, every once in awhile those differences can get in the way at work and cause discord in the office - simply because we don't take time to understand the values and experiences of the other person. This often leads to miscommunication.

Each generation uses different communication styles. A Traditionalist may prefer writing memos and letters to their boss or customers on an important issue and a Millennial might choose a much less formal route to communicate: an instant message. The Traditionalist might view the way younger generations communicate as disrespectful and the younger generations might view others as old-fashioned.

To avoid miscommunication, it is helpful to understand the differences of these generations:

**Traditionalists** were born between 1922-1943. This generation was greatly affected by World War II. This group appreciates a top-down hierarchy, formality and respect. Studies have shown that traditionalists value respect more than other generations. Traditionalists also like to make decisions based on what worked in the past. When communicating with someone from this group, it is important to remember to show your respect and appreciate the historical perspective of the person.

**Baby Boomers** were born between 1943-1960. There are 80 million boomers, which makes this a highly competitive group. Boomers tend to be workaholics and favor a top-down hierarchy and also value respect. Recognition is important to boomers. Usually they prefer a personable communication style that builds rapport.

**Generation X** was born between 1960-1980. Many Generation Xers grew up as latch-key kids after their parents got divorced or when mom returned to the workforce. They saw their Baby Boomer parents sacrifice family for work, only to be laid off from their jobs in the 1980s. Generation Xers tend to be very individualistic and skeptical. They value a balance between work and home life. This generation grew up with video games and fast food and are used to seeing instant results. This group likes efficiency and directness in their communication—no unnecessary meetings.

**Millenials** were born between 1980-2002 and are just entering the workforce. Millenials value a strong work and home life balance and are also collaborative and optimistic—the main difference between Millenials and Generation Xers. They grew up having a great deal of input into family matters and expect to be valued in the workforce, even though they do not have the work history that other generations do.

By understanding generational differences in the workplace, we can appreciate and communicate with each other better. Next time you have a conflict with someone of another generation, stop and reflect on that person's past experience. By bringing our collective perceptions and experiences together and appreciating those differences, we can have a more rewarding and enriching work environment.